

Bat-Watching Sites of Texas



TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

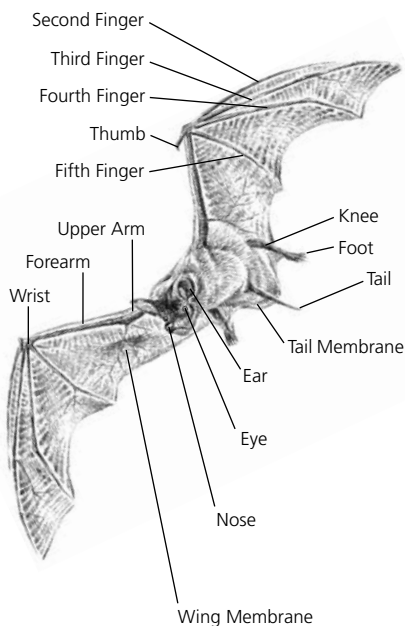
Welcome!

Texas happens to be the battiest state in the country. It is home to 31 of the 47 species of bats found in the United States. Not only does it hold the distinction of having the most kinds of bats, it also boasts the largest known bat colony in the world near San Antonio, and the largest urban bat colony found in Austin. Visitors from around the world flock to Texas to enjoy public bat-viewing at several locations throughout the state.

This guide offers you a brief summary of what each site has to offer as well as directions and contact information.

We invite you to visit some of these amazing sites and experience the wonder of a Texas bat emergence!

Bat Anatomy



A Year in the Life of a Mexican Free-tailed Bat

Mexican free-tailed bats (also known as Brazilian free-tailed bats) are the most common bat found throughout Texas. In most parts of the state, Mexican free-tailed bats are migratory and spend the winters in caves in Mexico. They begin their migration to Texas in February and by early spring female bats begin to form large maternity colonies where they will raise their young. There are only a small number of suitable sites for these large maternity colonies which require high humidity and temperature levels. In June, mother bats give birth to one pup. Male bats do not help in raising the young and form smaller bachelor colonies.

Bats are mammals so the pups are born live and weigh about 25 percent of their mother's weight. They feed from their mother's rich milk located in mammary glands found under each of her wings. The Mexican free-tailed bats' milk is so rich that the babies grow fast and are ready to fly within five to six weeks of birth. It is estimated that baby Mexican free-tailed bats roost in densities of up to 500 babies per square foot. It is amazing to think that mother bats are able to find their own baby amongst thousands of pups by using their sense of smell and by knowing the sound of their pup's call.

By mid-August the pups begin flying. It is at this time of the summer when the most spectacular bat emergences often occur as the colony size might easily double. When the first cold fronts start pushing through the Texas Hill Country in late October to mid-November, the Mexican free-tailed bats begin their migration back to Mexico.

Bat-Watching Etiquette

As adopted by the Texas Bat Viewing Site Forum

Viewing a bat emergence is one of the most memorable and exciting experiences in nature. The following guidelines are intended to help you enjoy watching bats without causing them harm or harm to yourself.

When to arrive/What to expect. Realize that a bat emergence is not a predictable event. No one can be sure when bats will come out or if they will even come out at all. Bad weather and other factors can cause bats to vary their emergence times. Call ahead to the site you will be visiting to find out approximately what time the bats have been emerging at that site.

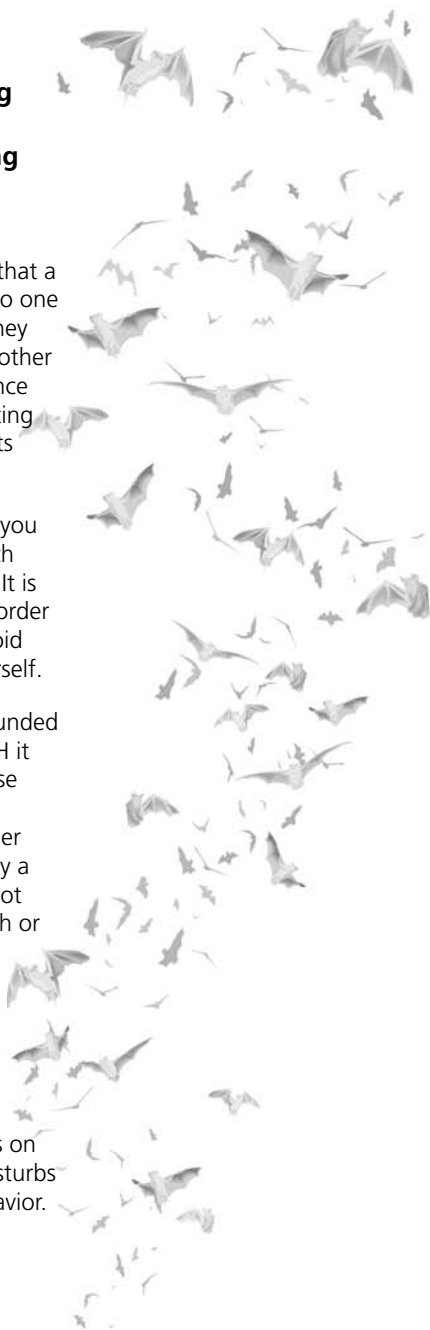
Keep your distance. Most of the bat sites you will visit have designated seating areas which are out of the direct flight path of the bats. It is important to remain in designated areas in order to minimize disturbance to the bats and avoid collisions for the safety of the bats and yourself.

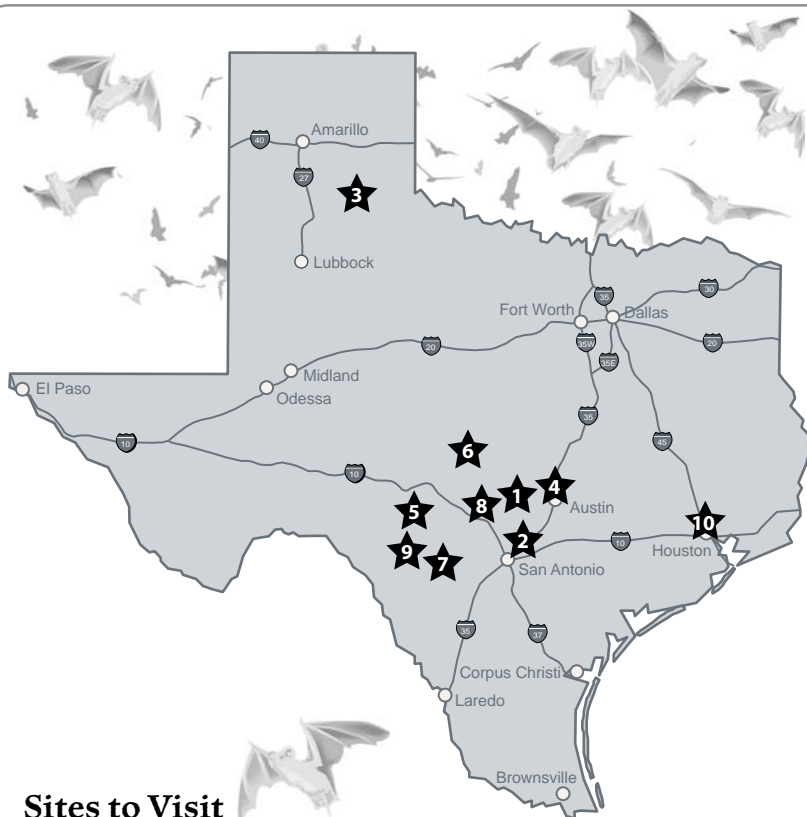
Do not touch! If you happen to find a grounded bat it is imperative that you DO NOT TOUCH it for the safety of the bats and yourself! Please alert the interpreter on staff. Wild animals may bite when threatened and bats like other mammals can contract rabies. Although only a small percentage of bats are rabid you cannot tell by simply looking at them so never touch or handle a bat.

Shhhh! It is important to keep your voices low while viewing a bat flight. Loud noises can disturb the bats and cause them to alter their emergence behavior.

No bright lights. Please do not shine lights on the bats or use flash photography as this disturbs the bats and will alter their emergence behavior.

No harassing the bats. Do not throw any objects at flying or roosting bats. This is a conservation site where bats are protected.





Sites to Visit

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Bamberger Ranch Preserve

(Privately Owned)

Hill Country Region

The Bamberger Ranch Preserve, located approximately seven miles south of Johnson City, houses the world's first and only man-made bat cave, known as the "Chiroptorium." "Chiroptorium" is a word made up of two words: chiroptera, the order of mammals to which bats belong and auditorium, where one can come to watch the emergence. Designed to hold up to 1 million Mexican free-tailed bats, the cave is made from a concrete mixture of gunite and fiberglass. Completed in 1998, the cave was not populated by a sizeable number of Mexican free-tailed bats until 2003. Now, however, bats return each year to this maternity roost, where female bats give birth and raise their pups. The uniqueness of the first man-made bat cave allows biologists a unique and rare opportunity to study how a bat cave ecosystem begins and evolves over time.

Although not open to the public for nightly bat viewing, the Bamberger Ranch Preserve does offer ranch tours and guest accommodations for environmentally-minded organizations and school groups. Tours cover a variety of ecological and biological topics, such as the importance of watershed management and biological diversity, use of native plants, and endangered species management.



BAT FACT BAT FACT BAT FACT BAT FACT

Although bats can see quite well they also use echolocation or sonar. The bats send out ultrasonic pulses from their nose or mouth. These sounds bounce off surrounding objects and back to a bats ears helping it to navigate and find food.

Fees:

\$25.00 minimum total fee for trip; \$10.00 per person for groups of three or more people

Reservations:

Reservations must be made in advance.

Hours:

Tours are offered on Friday evenings, during the months of June through September. Tours begin 1.5 hours before sunset. Allow five hours for the entire tour.

Handicapped Accessible:

No

Ownership:

Private landowner

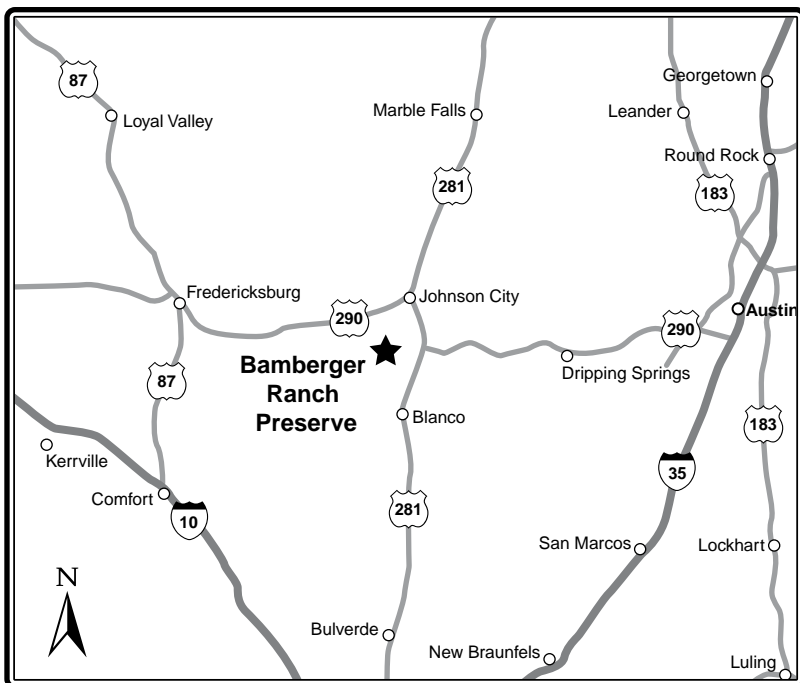
Contact Information:

(830) 868-2630

www.bambergerranch.org

Directions:

Call for directions.





Bracken Cave and Nature Reserve

(BCI members only)

Hill Country Region

Bracken Bat Cave, on the northern outskirts of San Antonio, is home to the world's largest bat colony: 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats. It is a key maternity site for this species, and females congregate there each year to give birth and rear their young. Mexican free-tailed bats are an essential predator of corn earworm moths and other crop pests, and the Bracken colony alone is estimated to consume 200 tons of these moths every summer night.

Bat Conservation International (BCI) initially purchased the Bracken Bat Cave in 1991 and now owns 697 acres of the former ranchland surrounding the cave. Although the land lost some of its original plant and animal diversity as a result of ranching and other commercial uses, it shows great promise as a Nature Reserve and is home to many bird species, including endangered Golden-cheeked warblers.

BCI is restoring the land to its former beauty and is raising money to one-day open this site to the public for education and research about bats and hill-country habitats. In the meantime, BCI hosts special visitation nights for its members and partners. BCI is working with the Nature Conservancy, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and other partners to ensure the protection of this amazing natural resource in Texas. For more information about the site and how you can help, visit www.batcon.org.



BAT FACTS BAT FACTS BAT FACTS

Bats drink on the wing and need clean, unobstructed drinking water sources.

It's very important that you never touch a bat!

Bats are protected by the state of Texas in their natural habitat

Fees:

Membership in Bat Conservation International (starting at \$35) required to attend special Members Nights.

Reservations:

Reservations are required for BCI members.

Hours:

Visitation is limited to BCI members on designated nights.

Handicapped Accessible:

Yes

Ownership:

Bat Conservation International

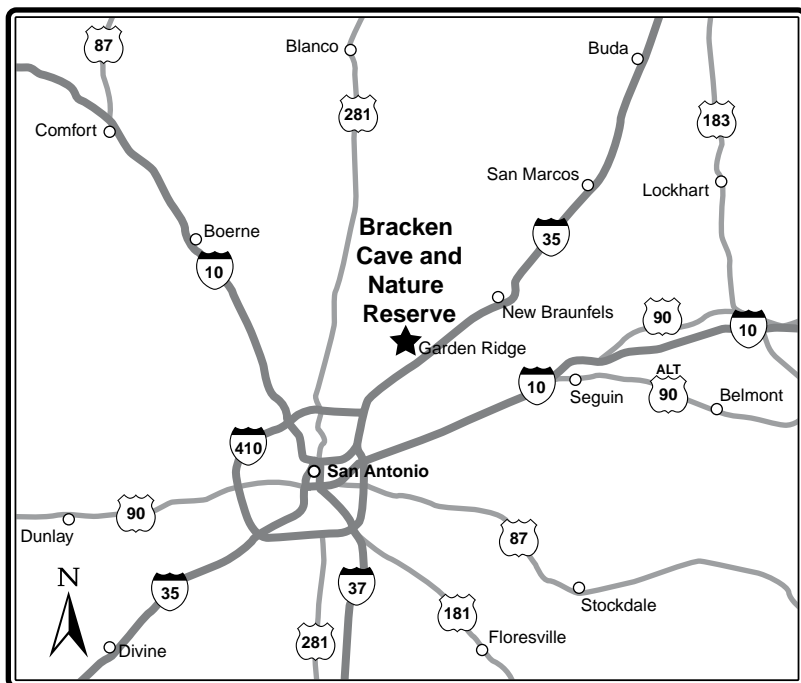
Contact Information:

BCI at (512) 327-9721

www.batcon.org

Directions:

Located in Comal County between New Braunfels and San Antonio.





Fees:

\$10 for adults; \$7.50 for senior adults; \$5 for children

Reservations:

Reservations must be made in advance.

Hours:

Tours are offered on Friday evenings, during the months of June through September. Tours begin 1.5 hours before sunset. Allow five hours for the entire tour.

Handicapped Accessible:

No

Ownership:

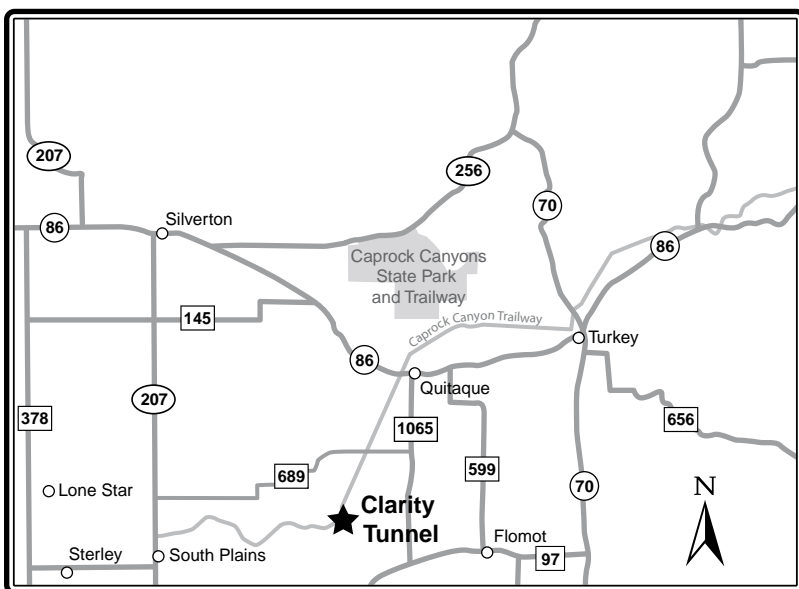
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Contact Information:

Park Interpreter at (806) 455-1140 or (806) 455-1492

Directions:

Tours will originate at the Monk's Crossing Trailhead on the Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway. To reach Monk's Crossing Trailhead from Caprock Canyons State Park or Quitaque, take F.M. 1065 south to F.M. 689. Turn right onto F.M. 689 and drive approximately two miles west to Monk's Crossing Trailhead. Parking at the trailhead is on the south (left) side of F.M. 689.





Congress Avenue Bridge

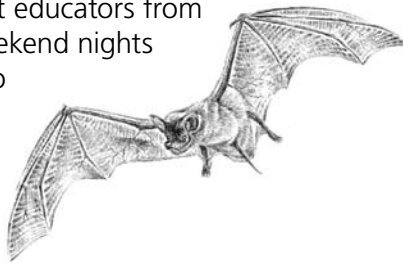
(Downtown Austin)

Hill Country Region

The Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge, located in the heart of downtown Austin, hosts the largest urban bat colony in the world, estimated at 1.5 million bats. It is a maternity colony, and mother Mexican free-tailed bats raise an estimated 750,000 pups each year at the bridge.

Large numbers of bats began roosting in the Congress Avenue Bridge in the early 1980s, shortly after it was renovated. Few people understood how valuable the bats were, and many feared them. It took a lot of effort by Bat Conservation International and other bat-friendly folks to help turn the tide of public opinion. Today, Austin loves its bats, and this international tourist attraction brings 100,000 people and more than \$8 million to Austin every year!

For the best bat viewing, watch from the Austin American-Statesman's Bat Observation Area. The Center offers educational kiosks year-round and bat educators from Bat Conservation International on weekend nights in June, July and August. You can also get nice views of the long columns of emerging bats from atop the bridge itself. Boat tours are available from Capital Cruises and Lone Star Riverboats. Call the Bat Hotline at (512) 416-5700, category 3636, for bat info and current emergence times.



**Mexican free-tailed bats
can fly up to 100 miles
round trip in an evening
looking for food.**

**They are built for speed with short
fur and long narrow wings and can fly
up to 60 miles per hour with a tail wind.
They have been observed feeding up to
10,000 feet while searching for food.**

BAT FACTS BAT FACTS BAT FACTS

Fees:

Free viewing from the Austin American-Statesman's Bat Observation Area on the east side of Congress Avenue.
Bat cruise fees range from \$5-\$8.

Reservations:

Reservations not needed for free viewing. To reserve space on a bat cruise see contact information below.

Hours:

Austin American-Statesman's Bat Observation Area is open year round and BCI interpreters are available to answer questions in the summer on Thursdays through Sundays; boat viewing seven nights a week from March through October.

Handicapped Accessible:

Yes

Ownership:

City of Austin, Austin American-Statesman; private boat companies

Contact Information:

Austin American-Statesman/BCI Bat Hotline
(512) 416-5700, category 3636 or www.batcon.org

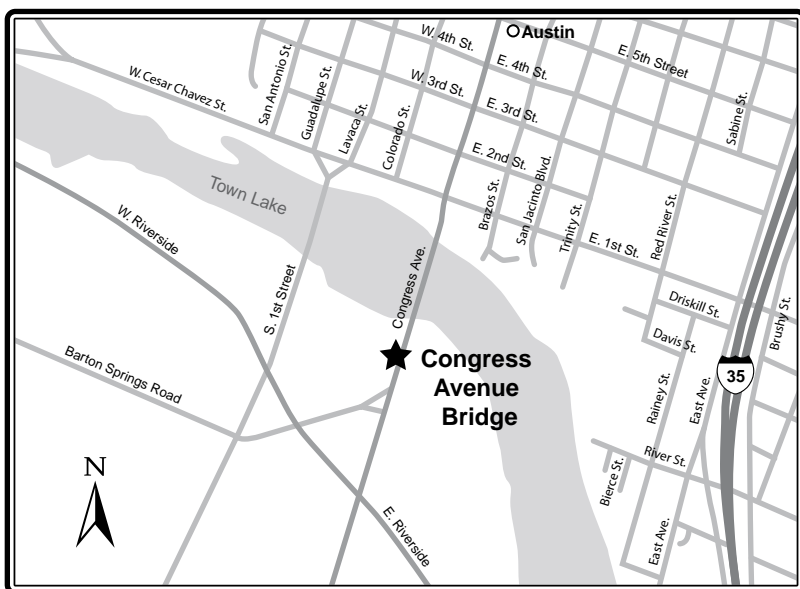
For boat viewing information:

Lone Star Riverboats: www.lonestarriverboat.com or (512) 327-1388.

Capital Cruises: www.capitalcruises.com or (512) 480-9264.

Directions:

From IH-35 in Austin where the Colorado River crosses IH-35, take Riverside Drive west 0.8 mile to Congress Avenue and turn north. The bat colony bridge spans Town Lake (the Colorado River).





Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area

Hill Country Region

The main attraction at Devil's Sinkhole SNA is the Devil's Sinkhole itself. The main cavern is circular, up to 60 feet wide at the opening, and 350 feet deep, making it the largest single-chambered cavern and the third deepest in the state. The Statue of Liberty could easily fit inside. About 3 million Mexican free-tailed bats inhabit the Sinkhole seasonally, from May thru October. These small, flying mammals put on quite a show in the evenings, forming a "tornado of bats" as they leave the cave to forage. About 3,000 to 4,000 Cave swallows inhabit the cave at night while the bats are gone, and it is quite a sight to watch the Cave swallows returning to the cave for the night while the bats are just beginning to emerge!

Since the bottom of the cave is below the water table, there are freshwater lakes around its perimeter. These lakes support two unique organisms: one, an endemic amphipod, a shrimp-like organism found nowhere else in the world, and the other, a rare aquatic isopod, which looks like a colorless pill bug. Also, the walls of the vertical shaft of the cave support a Mexican fern species found in few other locations in the United States.



BAT FACTS BAT FACTS BAT FACTS BAT FACTS

You can provide bats a place to live by building a bat house. Guidelines can be found on Bat Conservation International's Web site at www.batcon.org.

**There are over 1,100 different kinds
of bats found in the world.**

Fees:

\$12 for adults; \$10 for senior adults; \$6 for children 4 to 11; free for children under 4

Reservations:

Reservations must be made in advance.

Hours:

Visitor's Center open April-October 7 days a week from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; closed on Mondays November thru March.

Handicapped Accessible:

Yes

Ownership:

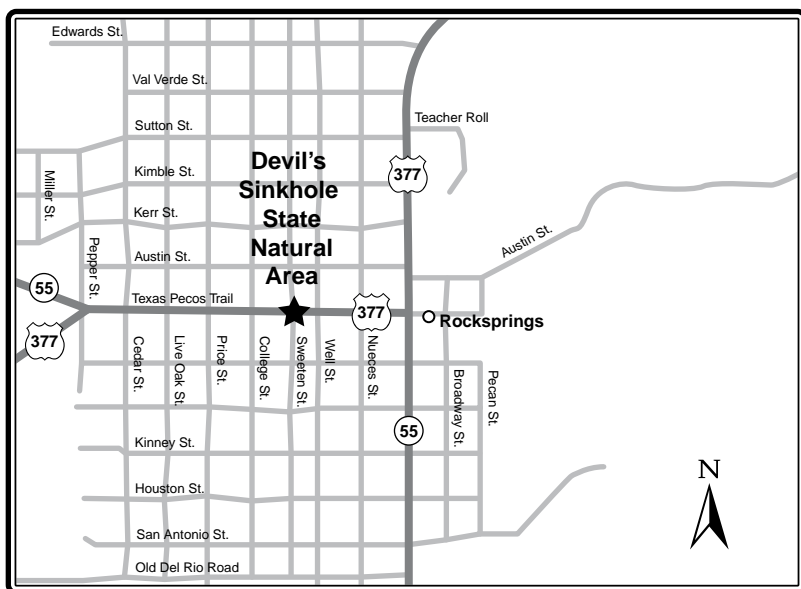
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Contact Information:

Devil's Sinkhole Society at (830) 683-2287 (BATS)
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/sinkhole
www.devilssinkholetx.com

Directions:

Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area is located north of Rocksprings on U.S. 377. The Devil's Sinkhole Visitor's Center is located in Rocksprings at 101 N. Sweeten Street. All tours meet at the Visitor's Center, and visitors must call in advance.





Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve

Hill Country Region

This unique preserve is home to 4 million to 6 million Mexican free-tailed bats and one of the largest concentrations of warm-blooded animals in the world. The cave supports a maternity colony where females give birth to and raise their pups. Because this species roosts in such large numbers, colonies are vulnerable to disturbance and could be destroyed by a single destructive act. Additionally, the population recovery rate for a colony of Mexican free-tailed bats is slow because females give birth to only one pup each year.

Richard Phillip Eckert and Virginia Eckert Garrett donated the cave to The Nature Conservancy in honor of their father, Lee Eckert, and grandfather, W. Phillip Eckert. The Eckert family acquired the property in 1907 when W. Phillip purchased the ranch on which the cave is located. In the early 1900s, W. Phillip mined the bat guano in the cave and sold it to local farmers for crop fertilizer. W. Phillip's son, Lee Eckert, continued his father's legacy of bat conservation and guano mining and left the site to his wife and children when he passed away in 1967. This generation of Eckerts wanted to ensure permanent protection of the bats, so in 1990, they donated the cave to the Conservancy on condition that the land around the cave remain open to the public for enjoyment and education, as it had been for more than 100 years.

BAT FACT BAT FACT BAT FACT BAT FACT BAT FACT

**Bats are incredibly
long-lived with
the oldest bat
living 41 years!**



Fees:

\$5 per person; free for children 5 and under

Reservations:

Reservations not taken, except special group reservations.

Hours:

Thursday thru Sunday from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., mid-May to early October

Handicapped Accessible:

No; however prior arrangements can be made for help in getting access

Ownership:

The Nature Conservancy of Texas

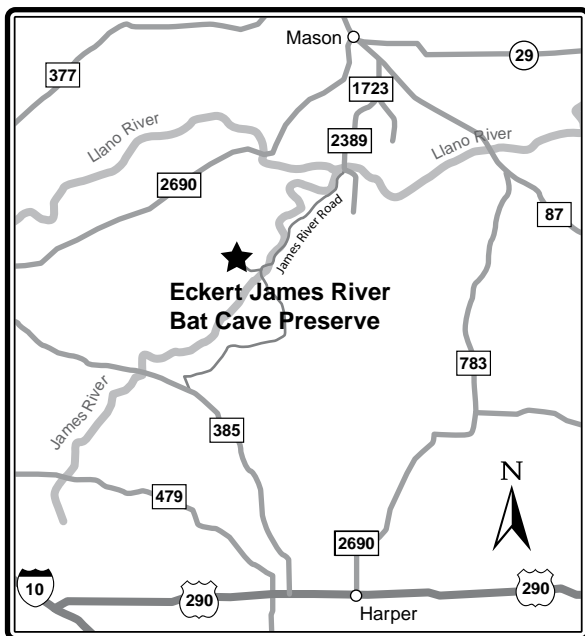
Contact Information:

Information Line, (325) 347-5970 or visit the Web site at
<http://nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/texas/preserves/art6022.html>

Directions:

From the intersection of TX 29 and U.S. 87 in Mason, go south on U.S. 87 for 1.2 miles to the intersection with F.M. 1723. Go south on F.M. 1723 for 2.3 miles to F.M. 2389. Take a right onto F.M. 2389 for 4.8 miles to James River Road. You will cross two bridges over the Llano River just before reaching

James River Road. Continue on James River Road for 8.2 miles to the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve. Note: just before reaching the preserve, you must cross the James River in your vehicle. River levels can be as low as a few inches in dry conditions and higher during wet seasons. Do not try to cross the river if over the 2-foot marker.

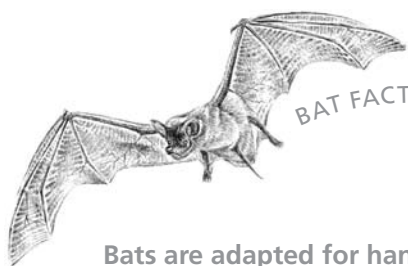




Frio Bat Cave **(Privately owned)**

Hill Country Region

View up to 10 million Mexican free-tailed bats, one of the largest colonies in Texas, as they make their ascent into the evening sky. This cave also provides the necessary elements mother bats need to give birth to and raise their pup each year. Hike to the top of the hill to witness one of nature's most incredible spectacles. Check the sky for Merlin, Zone-tailed hawk, Peregrine falcon and Red-tailed hawk, which hover just behind the crest of the hill to hunt the exiting bats. Around the cave you will see Cave swallow, Canyon wren and Rock wren. The 11,000-acre private ranch within which the bat cave is located provides excellent habitat for birds and other wildlife. Hill Country Adventures offers various tours on the ranch.



BAT FACTS BAT FACTS BAT FACTS BAT FACTS

Bats are adapted for hanging upside down. Their hind limbs are rotated 180 degrees so that their knees face backwards. They hang by their legs and use the claws on their toes to support their weight. Locking tendons in the toes allow the bats to hang without expending energy.

Some bats are important pollinators and seed dispersers and many of our everyday products, such as tequila, wild bananas, balsa wood and allspice to name a few, come from bat-dependent plants.

One of our Texas bats—the pallid bat—feeds on centipedes and scorpions crawling on the desert floor.

Fees:

\$10 per person; free for children 5 and under

Reservations:

Reservations must be made in advance.

Hours:

Mid-March thru September

Handicapped Accessible:

Yes

Ownership:

Private Landowner

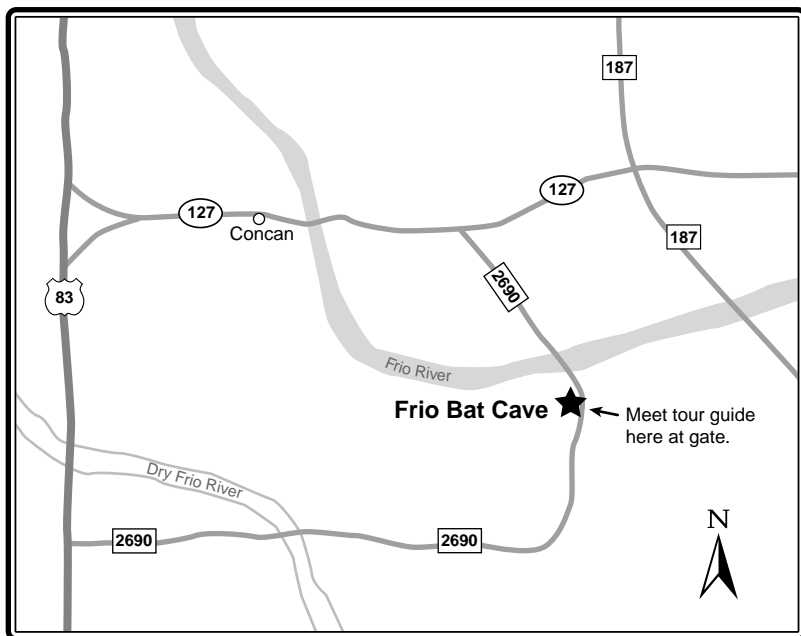
Contact Information:

LeAnn Sharp, Bain Walker and Lee Haile of Hill Country Adventures,
(830) 966-2320

www.hillcountryadventures.com

Directions:

Call for directions.



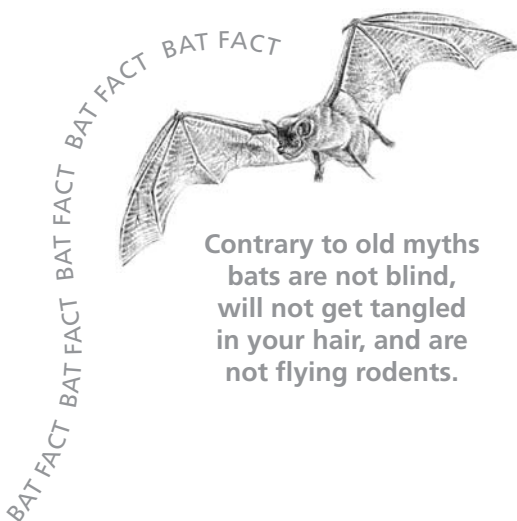


Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area

Hill Country Region

Old Tunnel WMA is home to up to 3 million Mexican free-tailed bats and 1,000 to 3,000 Cave myotis bats from May to October. This 920-foot, abandoned Fredericksburg and Northern Railway railroad tunnel was purchased by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for the specific purpose of protection and management of the bats. The bat colony at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area is considered a pseudo-maternity colony. While pregnant and lactating females use the tunnel, pups are not born in the tunnel but in nearby caves or bridges with more stable temperature and humidity levels. Because of this, the size of the colony fluctuates greatly throughout the season. By June, most bats have left Old Tunnel for their maternity roosts where their pups will be born and raised. However, by early August, many adult and juvenile bats begin to arrive at Old Tunnel once the pups can fly. The colony size continues to increase through mid-August, and will remain at peak numbers through late September and sometimes early to mid-October, depending on the frequency and strength of the fall cold fronts which signal the bats migration back to Mexico.

The WMA also offers a 0.5 mile nature trail through woodlands of Live oak, Escarpment black cherry, Black walnut, Hackberry and Ashe juniper. Birds along the trail include Yellow-billed cuckoo, Carolina wren, Carolina chickadee and Painted bunting. Several species of raptors can also be seen soaring over the adjacent canyon.



**Contrary to old myths
bats are not blind,
will not get tangled
in your hair, and are
not flying rodents.**

Fees:

\$5 for adults; \$3 for adults 65 and over; \$2 for children 6 to 16; free for children 5 and under

Reservations:

Reservations not taken, except for special group tours on Monday thru Wednesday evenings.

Hours:

Open year-round from sunrise to sunset; from May thru October, upper viewing area open seven nights a week and lower viewing area open Thursday thru Sunday from 2 hours before sunset.

Handicapped Accessible:

Yes

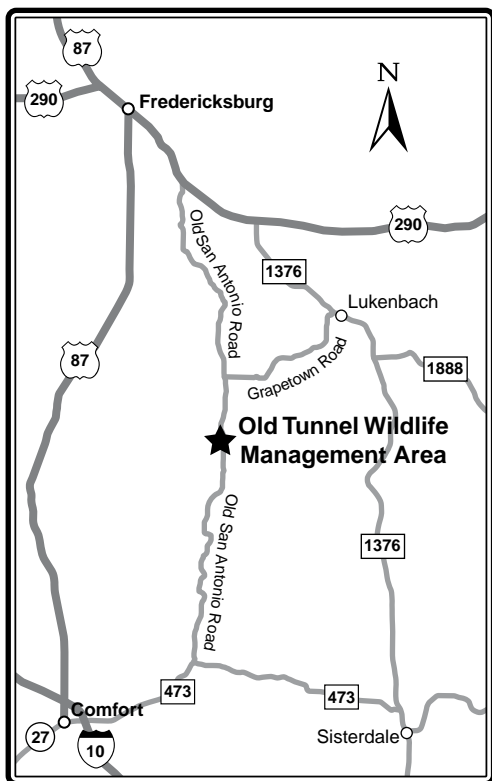
Ownership:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Contact Information:

Old Tunnel Information Line, (866) 978-BATS (2287)

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/hunt/wma/find_a_wma/list?id=17



Directions:

From Fredericksburg, take U.S. 290 east to Old San Antonio Road (OSR), about 0.5 mile east of the Fredericksburg City Limits. Turn right on OSR and drive 10.5 miles to the parking lot at Old Tunnel WMA, which will be on the left.

From IH-10 in Comfort, take Exit #523 (Hwy. 87 North). Turn south, heading into the town of Comfort. Go 0.5 mile to the blinking yellow light (look for sign with "Old Tunnel Wildlife Area"), and turn left at the blinking light onto F.M. 473. Stay on F.M. 473, which will take you back underneath IH-10, for five miles. When F.M. 473 makes a right turn to Sisterdale, go straight ahead on the Old #9 Hwy. for eight more miles. Old Tunnel WMA will be on the right at the top of a hill.



Stuart Bat Cave

Kickapoo Cavern State Park

Hill Country Region

Kickapoo Cavern, approximately 0.25 mile in length, boasts some impressive formations and can be toured by special arrangement. Stuart Bat Cave, slightly shorter than Kickapoo at 1,068 feet, serves as a spring-summer home for about a million Mexican free-tailed bats from mid-April to about mid-September. Bat flights are often spectacular, and tours are available.

This 6,368-acre site represents a convergence point for three distinct physiographical regions: the Edwards Plateau, Tamaulipan Brush and Chihuahuan Desert. Steep limestone canyons provide rich and varied habitat for a variety of wildlife. Ashe juniper and Live oak predominate throughout the park, but the canyons contain Texas persimmon, Shin oak, Agarita and Evergreen sumac. Blue-gray gnatcatchers, Bushtits, Verdins, Varied bunting, Montezuma quail and several species of vireos, including the endangered Black-capped vireo, occur here. Mammals include White-tailed deer, raccoon, ringtail, Gray fox, Rock squirrel and porcupine. Uncommon species of reptiles and amphibians include Barking frog, Mottled rock rattlesnake and Texas alligator lizard.



BAT FACT BAT FACT BAT FACT BAT FACT

Mexican free-tailed bats are very important for keeping crop pests in check as they can eat up to two-thirds of their body weight in insects each night, especially while lactating and feeding young. With the large numbers of agricultural pests they eat, research has demonstrated that these bats can save farmers up to two applications of pesticides per year.

Fees:

\$5 per person

Reservations:

Reservations must be made in advance.

Hours:

Various, call park for details.

Handicapped Accessible:

Yes

Ownership:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Contact Information:

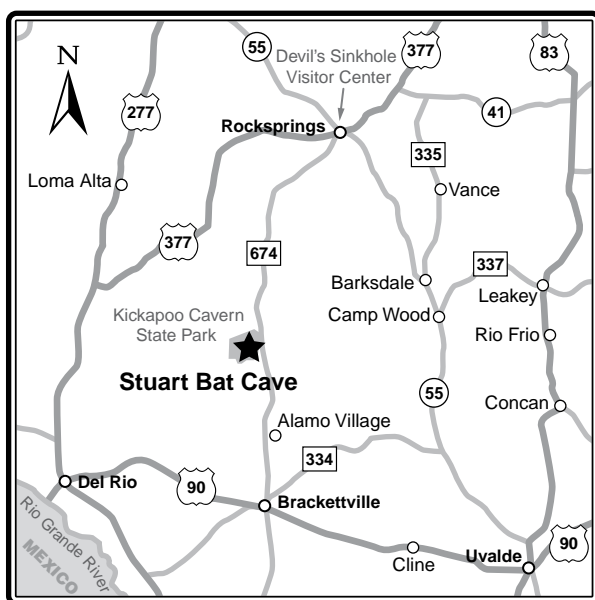
(830) 563-2342

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/kickapoo

Directions:

Kickapoo Cavern State Park is located approximately 22 miles north of Brackettville on F.M. 674. Visitors need to call in advance.

The park is currently open by guided tour only. Access to the park is available through wild cave tours and evening bat flights on specified tour dates



throughout the spring and summer. Potential visitors can call the park or check the Calendar of Events on TPWD Web site for exact dates. Specialized group tours may be arranged by contacting the park as well.



Waugh Drive Bridge

(Downtown Houston)

Gulf Coast Region

The bridge looks like a smaller version of the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin. Nestled among lush vegetation, the bridge sits over Buffalo Bayou, approximately 10 miles west of Downtown Houston.

An estimated 250,000 Mexican free-tailed bats call the bridge home. The bat population fluctuates through the year, with the peak in the summer and early fall. A large population of bats continues to reside in the bridge through the winter months, resulting in awesome emergences on warm winter evenings.

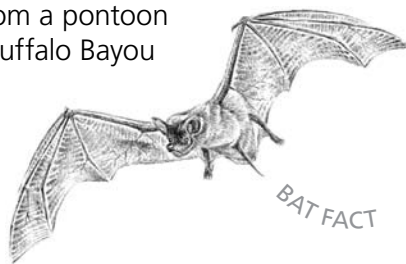
Upon emerging at sunset, the bats usually fly east along the bayou before dispersing. The best bat viewing locations are:

1) the viewing platform at the southeast corner of the bayou bank, next to the bridge (along Allen Parkway); 2) the northeast bank of the bayou, near the bridge (near Memorial Drive); and 3) on the east rail sidewalk of the bridge itself, looking directly down into the bayou channel.

The best emergences happen on warm nights any month of the year. However, the bats usually do not emerge when temperatures hover near 50 degrees or below, or when it is raining.

“Bat Night at the Bridge” occurs every third Friday and Saturday of the month throughout the year. Please arrive about 20 minutes before sunset to hear the presentation. On the third Friday and Saturday, Houston Bat Team members will be on-hand to answer questions about bats in general and the Waugh Drive Bridge bat colony. Bats may also be observed from a pontoon boat on Buffalo Bayou through the Buffalo Bayou Partnership for a fee.

Texas bats can be found in caves, cliff crevices, bridges, tree foliage, snags, hollow trees and occasionally buildings.



Fees:

Free viewing available from platform and sidewalk; fees for viewing from pontoon boat on Buffalo Bayou are: \$8 for adults; \$6 for senior adults; \$5 for children 3 to 11; free for children 2 and under.

Reservations:

Reservations are not needed for free viewing. To reserve space on the pontoon boat, see contact information below.

Hours:

Open year-round for viewing from platform and sidewalk; call for pontoon boat availability.

Handicapped Accessible:

Yes. Bats can be easily viewed from the viewing platform and the sidewalk. Guided tours can be arranged through the Houston Bat Team.

Ownership:

City of Houston

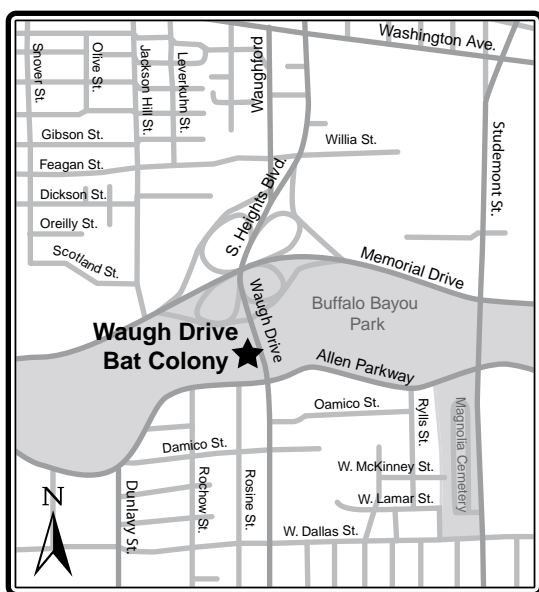
Contact Information:

General Information: City of Houston Parks and Recreation, (713) 845-1000
www.houstonparks.org

Pontoon Boat reservations: Buffalo Bayou Partnership, (713) 752-0314
www.buffalobayou.org

Houston Bat Team volunteers, presentations, general bat information
 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, (281) 456-7029 ext. 21

<http://community.webtv.net/masternaturalist/THEWAUGHBATMONITOR>



Directions:

From Interstate 10, west of Downtown Houston, take the Heights Blvd. exit. Go south on Heights Blvd., cross the railroad tracks and Washington Ave. Continue south. The road name changes to Waugh Drive. Memorial Drive will be reached next, then Allen Parkway. The bridge is located between Memorial Drive and Allen Parkway. Check the Web site for parking locations.



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